

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 7154

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS CASC ET

SUBJ: TENNECO SIX

REF: STATE 133217

1. ALTHOUGH PARA 3C OF REFTEL IS OBVIOUSLY WORDED VERY CAREFULLY, FONMIN WILL INFER FROM PRESENTATION ALONG THESE LINES THAT USG, ALTHOUGH NOT EXPLICITLY SAYING SO, DESIRES IEG RELEASE SOME ELF PRISONERS IN EXCHANGE FOR SAFE RETURN OF TENNECO CAPTIVES. FOR US TO MAKE AN APPROACH OF THIS NATURE TO IEG CLEARLY INCREASES FUTURE RISK OF KIDNAPPING OF OTHER AMERICANS IN ERITREA. TO CITE AN EXAMPLE, THERE WAS AN INCIDENT SEVERAL YEARS AGO IN WHICH US CONSUL GENERAL IN ASMARA WAS HELD BRIEFLY BY SOME ELF MEMBERS AND THEN RELEASED WITHOUT AN ATTEMPT TO EXTRACT CONCESSIONS. IF IEG RESPONDS TO US APPROACH BY AGREEING RELEASE SOME PRISONERS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE A REPETITION OF THIS INCIDENT.

2. THE PERSONS FOR WHOSE BENEFIT THIS ADDITIONAL RISK TO AMERICANS IN ERITREA IS TO BE INCURRED ARE ONES, WHO, IN ALL PROBABILITY AS FAR AS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE, DELIBERATELY EXPOSED THEMSELVES TO DANGER OF SEIZURE BY ELF. THE SECOND DIVISION HAD MADE CLEAR TO TENNECO GROUP THAT THEY SHOULD NOT LAND EXCEPT IN A SPECIAL AREA WHERE TROOPS HAD

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BEEN STATIONED TO INSURE THEIR SAFETY. THE TENNECO PEOPLE DID

THIS BUT THEN LANDED SUBSEQUENTLY IN ANOTHER AREA WHICH WAS UNPROTECTED AND WERE SEIZED BY ELF MEMBERS.

3. THE RECENT STATEMENT OF US GOVERNMENT POLICY ON KIDNAPPING OF US OFFICIALS WHICH HAS BEEN CIRCULATED TO ALL PERSONNEL HERE INDICATES THAT USG "WILL NOT PAY RANSOM, WILL NOT RELEASE PRISONERS, AND WILL NOT SUBMIT TO INTERNATIONAL BLACKMAIL BY TERRORIST GROUPS." THE USG NOW INTENDS TO URGE A QUITE DIFFERENT POLICY UPON THE IEG. IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT THIS IS MERELY THE APPLICATION OF ANOTHER SENTENCE IN THE POLICY STATEMENT REGARDING KIDNAPPINGS, NAMELY: "THE HOST GOVERNMENT IS FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING US OFFICIALS ABROAD AND SECURING THEIR SAFE RELEASE IF HELD WITHIN ITS JURISDICTION." AS INDICATED IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPH, WE BELIEVE THE IEG WENT TO CONSIDERABLE LENGTHS TO PROTECT THE TENNECO PEOPLE AND THAT THEY DELIBERATELY IGNORED SECURITY ADVICE GIVEN TO THEM BY THE IEG.

4. THE ABOVE POINTS WOULD NOT BE VALID IF WE HAD A GOOD ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING POSSIBLE INQUIRY BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER: "A-PART FROM THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS, OR THE PAYMENT OF AN ENORMOUS RANSOM, OR PERHAPS AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUTONOMY FOR ERITREA, IS THERE ANYTHING YOUR GOVERNMENT CAN THINK OF WHICH WE COULD DO WHICH WOULD LIKELY EFFECT THE RELEASE OF THE TENNECO HOSTAGES." WE DO NOT HAVE A GOOD ANSWER FOR THAT QUESTION HERE. THERE APPEARS TO BE NO CONCESSION WHICH IEG COULD MAKE TO ELF IN THIS CASE WHICH WOULD NOT INVOLVE INCREASED FUTURE DANGER FOR AMERICANS IN ERITREA.

5. ALL OF FOREGOING IS OBVIOUS AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT DEPARTMENT CAREFULLY CONSIDERED IT BEFORE SENDING REFTEL. I THEREFORE DISCUSSED APPROACH SET FORTH IN REFTEL WITH CANADIAN AMBASSADOR REYNOLDS ON JUNE 21. HE WAS SOMEWHAT SURPRISED THAT USG WAS WILLING TO TAKE THIS APPROACH BUT SAID HE WOULD SEEK INSTRUCTIONS FROM HIS GOVERNMENT ON SUBJECT.

6. WITH REGARD TIMING OF APPROACH, IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE SEEK MEETING WITH FONMIN EITHER NOW, OR BETWEEN RELEASE OF MRS. DORTZBACH AND WEDERFORT, OR AFTER RELEASE OF BOTH. I PROPOSED SECOND ALTERNATIVE TO REYNOLDS ON GROUNDS THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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NURSES'S UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE WILL STRENGTHEN CREDIBILITY OF THE "GO-BETWEEN" (AS WE REFER TO ZEIN IN DISCUSSIONS WITH IEG) IN EYES OF IEG BUT THAT TOO MUCH DELAY MIGHT BE INVOLVED IF WE CHOSE THIRD ALTERNATIVE, PARTICULARLY SINCE IT MAY TAKE IEG QUITE SOME TIME TO REACH DECISION ON THIS ISSUE. REYNOLDS CONCURRED. THEREFORE, IF RELEASE OF MRS. DORTZBACH TAKES PLACE THIS WEEKEND, I WILL IMMEDIATELY REQUEST APPOINTMENT WITH FONMIN FOR AFTERNOON JUNE 24. BY THAT TIME REYNOLDS HOPES HAVE IN-

STRUCTIONS.

7. IN MAKIN PRESENTATION TO FONMIN ALONG LINES PARA 3 REFTTEL, WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE LINE THAT TENNECO HAS TERMINATED ITS NOGOTIATING EFFORTS. IEG IS AWARE FROM PRESENTATION REYNOLDS AND I HAVE PREVIOUSLY MADE THAT ELF DEMAND FOR RELEASE OF VIE SPECIFIC PRISONERS HAS EMERGED FROM TENNECO'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH ELF. MOREOVER IT APPEARS PREFERABLE FOR IEG TO REGARD USG AS INTERMEDIARY ON THIS SUBJECT BETWEEN TENNECO AND IEG RATHER TNA BELIEVE USG IS NEGOTIATING DIRECTLY WITH ELF.

8. FOREGOING WAS DRAFTED PRIOR RECEIPT STATE 134616. REYNOLDS AND I BELIEVE JOINT APPROACH IS PREFERABLE AND THAT FONMIN IS APPROPRIATE INTERLOCUTOR. ASSUME DEPARTMENT AGREES WITH PROPOSED TIMING.
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